Atlas Hart Ballast Cars

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By Steve Sandifer

In January 2004, Atlas released their model #1154 of the Hart Ballast Car. The kit is available in 6 numbers for Santa Fe GA 59: 86505, 86545, 86550, 86555, 86611, 86620. An excellent reference for researching this car is the *Railway Prototype Cyclopedia #3*. The cars were featured in the *Warbonnet*, Volume 10, No. 1, 1st Quarter, 2004.

Santa Fe had 1700 of these cars numbered 77000-86799 built 1940-53 and in classes GA 50, 56, 59, 64, 74, and 83.

The Atlas car comes ready to run. It features separate wire grabs, knuckle couplers, interior ribs and bracing, and ultra-fine lettering. The cars weigh in at 4 oz. thanks to a metal underbody. The car looks great and fits a needed spot in the Santa Fe.

These cars are not without problems, however. The most visible is the trucks. The GA 59 cars came with National Type B trucks which don't resemble the somewhat generic three spring trucks on the model. Replacing the trucks is not simple since Atlas does not use NMRA bolster standards. There is no center sill on the ends of the car, so if you run them at a high view, the light will shine through. Some dimensions are slightly off, like the dump areas that are 7" too narrow. However, overall this is a good-looking model and a welcome addition.

Prior to its introduction the best car available was an MDC/Roundhouse offset hopper. I had customized 8 of these cars to serve the purpose, but even customized they don't compare favorable to Atlas. And what is worse, two of the numbers chosen by Atlas duplicate those on my MDC models.

Generally, these cars stayed on home rails moving ballast. They could be found at the most remote house track waiting for a local to spread the ballast at a low spot on the line. However, Tim O'Conner reports that "They could be used for sand too! UP, the Q, and the AT&SF put ballast cars into sugar beet service as needed during the 'beet rush'."